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Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance

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relied more heavily on technology, rejecting the sensible, local, non-instrumental “vernacular” science of everyday people. In detailing how these events were forgotten to such an extent that the very occurrences came to be denied, Valencius provides an enriched understanding of the state and purpose of early American science, its production of knowledge, its networks and boundaries. She offers as well a cautionary tale about the seductive yet constricting lure of quantified data.

Questioning what we think we know about the earthquakes, Valencius makes a case for why such knowledge matters, detailing the ways contemporary earth sciences have evolved to retrieve and reanimate not only those forgotten memories but also their meaning. Hers is a vast story spanning the two centuries since the earthquakes and connecting environmental history to community building; to the cultural, political, and social history of the nation; to histories of Native American spirituality, cultural resurgence, and military insurgency; to frontier revivalist religion; and to the very practices of scientific inquiry. As such, Valencius has written a text for scholars and lay readers alike.

Although the history of seismology itself may be of interest primarily to specialists, her larger argument about how science is packaged bears important lessons for more than midcontinent seismicity. At the outermost edge of the New Madrid seismic zone, closer to the more limited seismic activity of the Nemaha Uplift, Iowans remain safe from potential earthquake damage. Yet Valencius’s story of the willful denial of science serves as a warning to us all that we ignore uncomfortable science and its attendant public policy debates at our peril.

Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance, by Cheryl Janifer LaRoche. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014. xviii, 232 pp. Illustrations, maps, charts, notes, index. \$85.00 hardcover, \$25.00 paperback, \$22.50 e-book.

Reviewer Rebecca Conard is professor of history and director of the graduate program in public history at Middle Tennessee State University. She is the author of *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (2002) and *Places of Quiet Beauty: Parks, Preserves, and Environmentalism* (1997).

Cheryl LaRoche examines the long road to freedom literally at ground level. By carefully researching documentary sources along with archaeological evidence and oral tradition, and by observing historic and contemporary landscapes, LaRoche pieces together the histories of four free black communities in southern Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio to construct a compelling picture of the Underground Railroad in operation. Geography is the main focus, but she also gives voice to the unsung black

men and women who established these outposts in the clandestine network of waterways and pathways that were the routes of escape.

At Rocky Fork, Illinois, collected family histories align with land ownership records, archaeological evidence, and extant geographical features on undeveloped land to document four homesteads in a heavily wooded area that anchored what is believed to have been "one of the first stops on the Underground Railroad along the Mississippi River in Illinois" (42). At Miller Grove, Illinois, landscape features, public records, and the letters of two abolitionists who traveled the backcountry as Bible salesmen reveal the story of a cluster of farms associated with 68 African Americans who were freed in the 1840s by four white families in south-central Tennessee. At Lick Creek, Indiana, freedom papers, land records, and archaeological evidence help to document the early nineteenth-century origins of a rural settlement of African Americans who farmed or worked as tradesmen and who were aided to freedom by Quakers before the Underground Railroad flourished as an organized operation. At Poke Patch, Ohio, the documentary record thickens to expose the interconnections between the Baptist and AME churches and white industrialists who supported abolition. Working together, they transformed the iron-furnace region of southern Ohio into a haven for African Americans escaping enslavement via the Ohio River.

In part two LaRoche calls attention to the geographies of resistance, noting that "the landscape is an intimate yet underexplored component of the Black experience, where danger lurked and freedom beacons" (87). She traces the land settlement patterns of interconnected families, the valleys and rivers that linked black settlements and other safe havens, the caves and remote wooded areas that provided temporary cover, and the cemeteries that record the final resting places of countless individuals, some well known and others whose names are just coming to light, who made the Underground Railroad work. In chapter six, LaRoche asks us to consider "the dispersed, often individual escapes culminating in the Underground Railroad" as one of the migrations ingrained in black history, from the Middle Passage to the Great Migration of the early twentieth century (105). In part three she examines the interconnections among black abolitionists, black churches, black fraternal organizations (particularly the Free Masons), and missionary societies to support her argument that the "covert works of African Americans drove the efforts inside one of the world's most successful resistance movements" (156).

The Geography of Resistance is carefully researched, tightly organized, and written from the heart. At times LaRoche's language soars, yet she never reaches beyond the evidence. Iowa stations along the Underground Railroad are not the subject of this book, but in many

respects the book provides a model for linking the many local histories associated with the Underground Railroad to the national story. Notably, LaRoche recognizes the natural environment as an agent of history, and she deftly weaves the landscape into each story. In other respects, the book demonstrates the level of scholarship that is now possible thanks to research conducted in recent decades by federal archaeologists and by African American historical organizations, and the work that has been encouraged and guided by the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program of the National Park Service. It is hard to imagine this book having been written 20, or even 10, years ago, but it is a good example of what may be to come.

Across the Divide: Union Soldiers View the Northern Home Front, by Steven J. Ramold. New York: NYU Press, 2013. ix, 223 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$49.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Donald C. Elder III is a professor of history at Eastern New Mexico University. He is the editor of *Love amid the Turmoil: The Civil War Letters of William and Mary Vermilion* (2003) and *A Damned Iowa Greyhound: The Civil War Letters of William Henry Harrison Clayton* (1998).

In *A Stillness at Appomattox*, Bruce Catton related an incident from the Civil War involving Colonel Stephen Thomas of the Eighth Vermont Infantry. A staunch Democrat at the start of that conflict, by 1864 Thomas had embraced many of the wartime measures adopted by President Abraham Lincoln, a Republican. When Thomas returned home on leave, he was berated by his prewar associates for having forsaken his political principles. "Thomas, you've changed — we haven't," they stated. "Fools never do," was the colonel's reply.

That exchange illustrates the central thesis of Steven Ramold's *Across the Divide*. Ramold asserts that many of the men who served in the Union Army underwent a change in attitude similar to that experienced by Stephen Thomas. Believing that the suppression of the rebellion was a just cause, Union soldiers were willing to accept more expansive governmental policies designed to help accomplish that goal. Civilians, however, were not always as agreeable to those changes. This, Ramold suggests, left Union soldiers increasingly disconnected (both physically and psychologically) from those they had left behind.

Ramold identifies six issues that illustrate the chasm between Northern soldiers and civilians: (1) Union soldiers increasingly sensed that they faced opposition from people back home as well as in the Confederacy; (2) "a new gender reality" generated by the conflict alienated many Northern soldiers; (3) the issue of abolition proved problematic